



Participation Strategy

Plymouth Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership

The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership agreed this document
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Introduction

Involving children and young people in planning and decision-making is still considered by many to be a difficult and challenging process, with many people questioning the benefits. This document will look at the importance of involving children and young people as well as explaining the meaning of participation and offering suggestions for practical support in developing participative practices.

Experience from new and recent programmes such as Connexions, Sure Start Local Programmes and Children's Fund have shown that the principles of community involvement and user participation contribute greatly to the success of the programme. This has been recognised by Government and new legislation such as Every Child Matters and Youth Matters are actively seeking input from Children and Young People as well as pushing for participation at local levels.

Actively seeking the participation of Children and Young People, their families and carers brings many benefits, not only for the service users but for the service too. Benefits for the young person include self-learning, self-respect and respect for others, a sense of ownership, self-confidence and many other key skills that are essential to a young person's development.

Children and young people have a right to participate and influence key decisions that shape their lives. This right is formally recognised in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Great Britain in December 1991.

Services and the community will both benefit. Services will be more successful by ensuring they meet and deliver on the needs of their service users.

Through this document we hope to highlight how organisations, whilst promoting participation can do so in a consistent manner across all disciplines and services irrespective of the organisation.

Representatives from organisations across the City have come together to develop this document and support a fostering of good participative practices across the Plymouth. A very sincere thank you to everyone who has contributed to its development.

Representation has been from:

Connexions	Youth Enquiry Service
Children's Fund-Plymouth Partnership	Health Services
Social Services	Plymouth & District Racial Equality Council
Lifelong Learning	Devon Youth Association
Plymouth Youth Service	Scope
All Children First	Plymouth Parent Partnership
Sure Start Local Projects	NCH – Care Leavers Project

Vision

The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership wants service users, their families, carers and other stakeholders to participate in our work at all levels. Participation should influence all services from the bottom up as well as the top down. Service users should not only be consulted, they should be supported to express their views, have their voices listened to and be fully engaged in the development, design, delivery and evaluation of user focused services.

Participation has to be considered throughout all services and agencies and built in to its practices, procedures and policies. Service users should be supported to be able to contribute meaningfully to the service or agency.

Definitions

Children and Young People

We have not defined a minimum age in regard to promoting active participation. It is recognised that children in their early years are able and should be given opportunities to engage meaningfully in decisions made for and about them. In general terms this document is concerned with children and young people aged 4 – 19 years but the principles of participation apply equally to younger children and older young people. Many organisations define young people as aged up to 24.

In Plymouth about 32% of the population is aged under 24 (source: Plymouth Informed website, figures taken from GP population). This is a significant proportion of the population that can have valuable input into shaping the services available to them; ensuring they are effective and meet their needs. Throughout this document the use of the words child, children or young people refer to both children and young people.

Participation

Participation is about providing choices and opportunities for children, young people, parents and carers to have an input into decisions that affect their lives. It is about talking to and listening to services users, encouraging and supporting them to contribute, and acting on their views and ideas whilst being open, honest and realistic with them on the levels of involvement they can have.

All children and young people should be given the opportunity to participate in the consultation and decision making process, Whilst participation and consultation should be encouraged, it should be acknowledged that not all children and young people will want to be involved; they should however, be given the opportunity.

Treseder's Definition

Treseder's definition of participation:

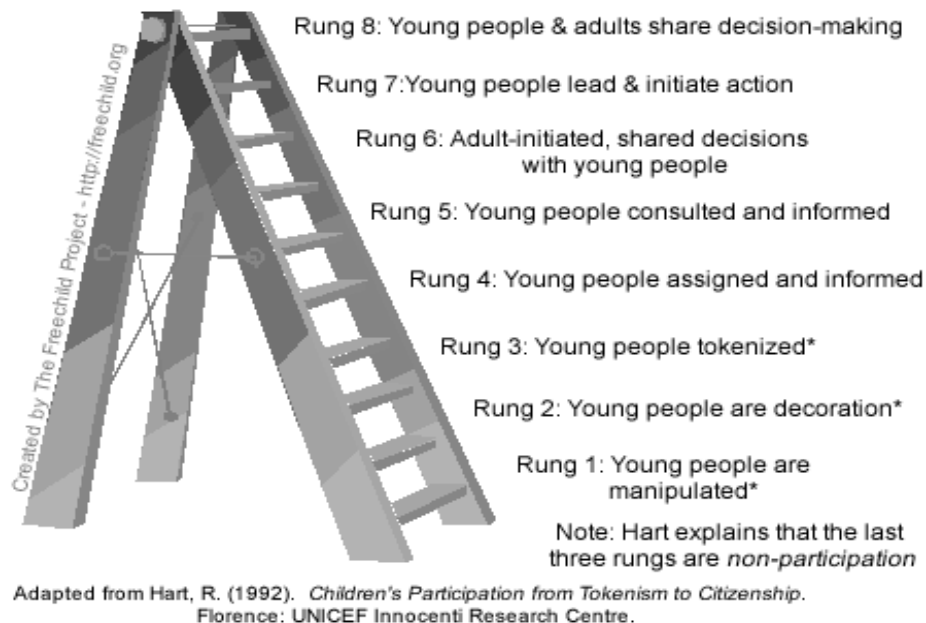
- Participation: the process of involving children and young people in decision making at increasing levels of autonomy.
- Empowerment: the outcome of this participation process in terms of children and young people's power and influence.
- Involvement: the overall term for children and young people being included in the decision making process at any level.
- Consultation: a process which requires the commitment to take on board young people's view and present detailed information back to them.

Source: *Save The Children, Empowering Children and Young People, Treseder 1997.*

From this definition it is clear that true participation is much more than consultation. It is involving users in all aspects of service planning and delivery from concept to delivery and evaluation.

Hart's Ladder of Participation

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



1) Manipulation

Happens where adults use young people to support causes and pretend that young people inspire the causes.

2) Decoration

Happens when young people are used to help or "bolster" a cause in a relatively indirect way, although adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by young people.

3) Tokenism

When young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate.

4) Assigned but informed

This is where young people are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved.

5) Consulted and informed

Happens when young people give advice on projects or programs designed and run by adults. The young people are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults.

6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people

Occurs when adults initiate projects or programs but the decision-making is shared with the young people.

7) Young people-initiated and directed

This step is when young people initiate and direct a project or program. Adults are involved only in a supportive role.

8) Young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults

This happens when young people initiate projects or programs and decision-making is shared between young people and adults. These projects empower young people while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults.

Benefits

It is possible to identify many benefits to involving children and young people in all aspects of services and decision-making not just for the children but also for the services they access and the community as a whole.

Benefits for children and young people

- It is their right
- Personal development, development of new skills
- Increase in self-worth and self esteem
- Services become more receptive and responsive to needs of children and therefore produce better outcomes

Benefits for the community

- Children become creators not just users
- Communities become more receptive to needs of children and young people
- Community is valued by children and young people when they have a sense of ownership and involvement
- Children become more aware of local democracy

Benefits for organisations

- More accountable and improved decision making
- More responsive to needs of children and young people
- Services are based on actual need not presumed needs
- Services are more responsive to changes in needs
- Children and young people bring a fresh perspective and innovative ideas
- Children and young people can challenge established methods and ideas
- Less conflict. *“The opportunity [for children] to express their views and negotiate reduces the potential of conflict between children and staff and children and children”* Source: *Save the Children*

Barriers

There are many barriers that prevent effective participation of service users in developing and planning services, many of which can be easily overcome, some will need additional resources and support.

- Cynicism – ‘why should I involve service users, I know best, it won’t make any difference’
- Anxiety about what will happen – ‘I don’t want to get involved, I won’t know how to do it’
- Feeling they wouldn’t be effective in any programme anyway – ‘I won’t be able to make a difference’
- Not wanting to fuss – ‘I don’t want to make waves by getting them to change’
- Experience of failure – ‘It never worked in the past so why should it now’
- Low self-esteem – ‘I can’t get involved in that’
- Lack of time – ‘we haven’t got the time to involve children’
- Fear of losing control – ‘children can’t make decisions, it’s my service, I say what happens’
- Apathy – ‘I can’t be bothered’
- Fear of the unknown/change – ‘this could lead us into uncharted territory’
- Lack of commitment – ‘the tick box approach rather than real meaningful participation’

There are many more barriers and they will be dependant on the service, the service users and the staff of a service.

Organisations looking to develop their participative practices should highlight as many barriers as they can think of and seek ways of addressing them.

Strategic Aims & Objectives

The aim of this strategy is to bring a coordinated approach to the participation of children and young people.

It should bring about:

- A consistent standard of participation and involvement across local agencies
- A culture change, improving participation levels
- A culture of sharing best practice and learning from each others experiences
- An environment where joined-up working is considered the norm
- To develop and improve the opportunities for children and young people to be actively involved in decision making for and about them.

The following objectives should support achievement of the aims

- To actively promote children and young people's participation and involvement across public, community and voluntary sector organisations in Plymouth
- To ensure the participation is meaningful, valued and not tokenistic
- To support and develop the knowledge and skills in organisations
- To support the development of children and young people to give them the skills and capacity to participate.
- To support the development of participative practices in all children and young people's services across the City.
- To support agencies who do not work directly with children to understand how their decisions still affect children and young people

Participation in Practice

Champions

Local Government Association and the National Youth Agency advocate the importance of a “Champion” at senior level (e.g. Director or Councillor) within organisations. This role is to ensure the effective involvement in service planning. Someone with enough authority to ask: “How have you involved Children and Young People?”, “What are you doing to involve children and young people in your decision making?”, “How have children and young people informed you plans?”

Co-ordination

Different agencies and organisations have vastly differing experiences of participation and undertaking participation work. Sharing best practice, experiences, successes and failures is a truly effective way of learning and preserving resources. Time and effort and goodwill can easily be lost in trying to develop work that others have experimented with and dropped, resources can be saved by sharing and adopting those models that have proved effective.

This paper will explore effective avenues of sharing best practice

Standards

A number of national & local standards frameworks have been developed to assist organisations in developing participation, examples include:

- Learning to Listen, Children and Young Peoples Unit (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/listeningtolearn/downloads/LearningtoListen-CorePrinciples.pdf>)
- Children are Service Users Too, Save The Children (<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/resources/details.jsp?id=494&group=resources§ion=publication&subsection=details>)
- Reach – The quality Practice Framework for Youth Action Agencies (<http://www.youthactionnetwork.org.uk>)
- Quality Protects (looked after young people) (<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/qualityprotects>)
- Hear By Rights, National Youth Agency (<http://www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright/home.asp?cid=180&cats=215>)
- Children’s Fund – Plymouth Partnership, Standards of Participation
- Taking Part Toolkit, Barnardos (http://www.barnardos.org.uk/taking_part_toolkit_-_promoting_the_real_participation_of_children_and_young_people_-_summary.pdf)
- Pupil Participation, DfES (http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/banda/pupil_participation/)
- Participation Works, British Youth Council (<http://www.participationworks.org.uk/>)

Each of these frameworks is designed to meet the needs of the organisation and its users. Services, organisations can readily adopt principles and ideas from each of the published works to help them foster a system that supports their needs.

It is therefore recommended that agencies, organisations and service providers be supported to find, develop and adapt frameworks to meet their needs and the needs of their service users.

Appropriate techniques

There are many different and effective techniques, many of which children's services use on a daily basis. In determining which participation techniques/activities to use agencies should consider a few issues:

- Purpose of the participation exercise
- Age and ability of the service users
- Needs of the service users
- Topic
- Number and characteristics of the children involved
- Resources available
- Skills of the workers

It is recommended therefore a toolkit of techniques and approaches be developed to support participation activities.

Equality of Access

It is vital that we do not unlawfully discriminate against children and young people or prevent them from participating in decision-making on grounds of race, religion, culture, nationality, ethnic origin, age, disability, sexuality, orientation, gender, language, or where they live to reflect statutory obligations.

All agencies should have appropriate measures in place to ensure they are committed to and supporting equal opportunities and do not discriminate. Participation goes further, service providers should look at their services in depth and consult to ensure they understand the needs of children and young people from marginalised groups and how those needs may be met to provide fair and equal access to services.

Literature and relevant information should be available to children and young people. It should be jargon free and in appropriate languages, culturally appropriate and accessible; and in alternative formats upon request.

The Way Forward - Recommendations & Actions

Recommendations

- **Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership adopt the principles of Hear By Rights and support all Children's Services in Plymouth to develop strong participative practices**

Hear by Rights is a tool that has been adopted by many Children's Trust's and Children and Young People Strategic Partnership's to develop participation. There are many tools available and users should be free to utilise a toolkit that best suits their organisation or service. In adopting the principles of Hear by Rights services and organisations are free to explore tools that will meet their needs but also meet these principles.

- **CYPSP should establish a participation awareness raising programme to help build a culture that ensures participation is central to the way agencies make decisions**

It is important to develop an organisational and structural awareness and understanding of children's participation and its implications, that is both shared and secures the commitment of all stakeholders. It will inevitably have change implications; until adults and organisations understand this and recognise the benefits culture change will not happen.

- **CYPSP should undertake a series of planned initiatives that focus on creating sustainable change within its own structures and with its partners to create a suitable environment for participative activities.**

This will contribute to the capacity building and bringing about sustainable change within the key adult players and organisations within Plymouth.

- **CYPSP should ensure the consistent and appropriate development of Children and Young People in the design, delivery, evaluation, and commissioning of services it provides.**

Children and young people should be properly consulted about issues that are of concern to them. A clear objective is to routinely involve children and young people in the process of assessing need, designing responses, project development and implementation, commissioning and evaluation.

- **CYPSP should develop systems to communicate clear messages to children and young people in order to encourage them to participate and inform them of decisions/actions taken as a result.**

Children and young people should receive positive information in a format that they will use in order to encourage them to participate.

Children and young people should feel valued and respected and that their opinions are listened to.

- **CYPSP should ensure that ways used to consult with and involve children and young people are fair, inclusive and appropriate and which aim to empower them.**

To ensure the quality of information and the integrity of consultation, as well as ensuring children and young people are given the opportunity to participate, it is vital that participation equality and inclusive practice is adopted.

Action Points

Action points	How	Who/Funding
Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership adopt the principles of participation and support all Children's Services in Plymouth to develop strong participative practices	A dedicated team of specialists be utilised to support citywide development and coordination of participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current participation workers £200k (Children's Fund, Youth Service, Connexions, Children's Services – NCH Care Leavers) ▪ Co-ordinator for participation (New post) Total Funding = £250k per annum with new funding of £50k
	A series of toolkits is developed/sourced/adapted to support specialist participation work	Co-coordinator/participation workers – within costs above
	The principles of Hear by Rights are widely disseminated through all organisations and partners.	All Agencies – no cost
	Organisations that provide services for or on behalf of the emerging Children's Trust must adopt the principles of Hear By Rights and utilise a toolkit(s) to develop participation in the service.	All Agencies – no cost
	CYPSP, as a priority, ensure that all work streams plan involvement of CYP in their activities.	Pooled budget for CYPSP to support participation work through existing services plus co-ordinator Funding - £50k (for cyp and parents/carers)
CYPSP should establish a participation awareness raising programme to help build a culture that ensures	Develop a tiered participation-training programme targeted at all levels of staff including senior managers. Highlighting importance and benefits include ideas and techniques for staff. Roll out training on a planned basis	Co-coordinator/participation workers within costs above
	Identify models of good practice for dissemination to all partners and key agencies.	Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above

participation is central to the way agencies make decisions	Lead by example, ensure children and young people's version of the plan is created by children and young people for dissemination	All Agencies – no cost
	Lead by example; coordinate development of participation groups as part of or alongside work streams.	All Agencies – no cost
CYPSP should undertake a series of planned initiatives that focus on creating sustainable change within it's own structures and with it's partners to create a suitable environment for participative activities.	Recruit, train and support children and young people to participate with work streams.	Pooled budget for CYPSP to support participation work through existing services plus co-ordinator Funding - £50k (for cyp and parents/carers)
	Provide on-going support to children and young people participating in existing activities	Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above
	Create solutions to allow children and young people to participate in commissioning processes	All Agencies – no cost
	Devise/adopt training to support children and young people and staff in services to participate in joint decision making	Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above
	Ensure that staff recruited into posts are aware of the importance of participation. Person specifications should include a commitment to children and young people's participation	All Agencies – no cost
	Engage with all services working with children, partners and agencies and schools to ensure all opportunities to build awareness are maximised. Ensure all lessons learnt form time limited interventions are shared widely.	All Agencies – no cost
CYPSP should ensure the consistent and appropriate development of Children and Young People in the design, delivery, evaluation and commissioning of services it provides	Ensure children and young people are properly consulted about issues of importance and that in developing proposals from this; feedback should be given to those who took part. Feedback should include information about what was learnt and what decisions, plans have been made or not been made as a result and include reasoning.	Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above
	Require newly commissioned services to develop implementation plans to demonstrate how children and young people will be involved at each stage of project development and to provide evidence of how successfully this has been achieved.	All Agencies – no cost Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above

	Develop methods of involving children and young people in evaluation, drawing on good practice, and promote these in commissioned services.	All Agencies – no cost Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above
	Ensure participation is included in monitoring and reporting systems for commissioned services.	All Agencies – no cost Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above
CYPSP develop systems to communicate clear messages to children and young people in order to encourage them to participate and inform them of decisions/actions taken as a result	Ensure adequate resources are included in any activity to ensure participation is undertaken in a professional manner. Ensure all tenders for services are required to include allowances for participation activities and capacity building	All Agencies Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above
	Ensure children and young people's versions of documentation, plans, policies, etc. are produced and are accessible to children and young people	All Agencies – no cost Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above
	Ensure all information for children and young people is disseminated widely in a format and media this is relevant. Children's websites such as YPmix are an excellent tool	All Agencies – no cost Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above
	Ensure children and young people are aware of children's rights and understand the implications of having them through information and training	All Agencies – no cost Co-coordinator/participation workers
	Ensure the profile of Participation is maintained at a high level by supporting Children's Fun events and supporting children's involvement in activities.	All Agencies – no cost Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above
	Involve children and young people in developing ways of telling parents, families, friends, carers, policy makers and service providers about the importance and value of participation	All Agencies – no cost Co-coordinator/participation workers
	CYPSP should ensure that ways used to consult with and involve children and young people are fair, inclusive and appropriate and which aim to empower them	Draw on existing good practice; ensure that service providers, organisations and partners adopt a range of techniques, which meet the needs of all children. Questionnaires are not the only tool!
	Ensure techniques and support are appropriate to age and ability	All Agencies Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above
	Ensure feedback is obtained on all participation/consultation activities to ensure effectiveness and relevance	All Agencies Co-coordinator/participation workers; within costs above

	<p>Consultation activities should be coordinated to ensure: That there is no duplication of information gathering across partners agencies and service providers No one group of children and young people are over-consulted No groups are omitted. We identify any consultations that can be joined together to share resources and reduce costs and share expertise.</p>	<p>All Agencies Co-coordinator/participation workers</p>
	<p>Monitoring information is gathered to ensure validity of data for its purpose.</p>	<p>All Agencies Co-coordinator/participation workers</p>
	<p>Children and Young People are informed about the reason for the consultation and the value of their input</p>	<p>All Agencies Co-coordinator/participation workers</p>